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ABSTRACT

An individual who undertook the study of Lithuanian recounts his experiences in getting started and provides information about available materials and radio broadcasts in the language. Texts, tapes, records, and materials designed for children are listed and sources provided. Techniques found to be useful for independent language learning are also described. (MSE)

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LET'S LEARN LITHUANIAN

by

Jonas Keidošius

Through much labor and after many years of study, I became somewhat conversant in Spanish. I am now successfully using the techniques by which I learned Spanish to teach myself Lithuanian. I am not especially gifted with linguistic ability -- ask any of my English speaking friends. However, I tested my patience in listening to the constant repetition of verb conjugations in various tenses, not to mention noun declensions in different cases, to the point I can repeat them by rote.

My accomplishments in Spanish inspire my confidence to learn the language of my forebearers, Lithuanian. Knowing that Lithuanian has been spoken for 5000 years and that it is the oldest surviving Indo-European language, I thought it should be relatively easy to find a self-taught course with cassette tape. I was wrong! It took nearly 9 months to do so. Now that I am actively engaged in Lithuanian language study, I will share the experience with you so that others may avoid my pitfalls. Comments on available courses are provided to help guide your choice of study.

The State Department and various military language schools, including the Defense Language Institute, were unable to even provide me an address where I might write for a Lithuanian language course. There seemed to be nothing available in the National Capitol region. It was my sister, Carol, in Cleveland, who purchased Introduction to Modern Lithuanian, with tapes, from the Lithuanian gift shop at the parish of Our Lady of Perpetual Help. Later in the year, Al Juškus, who directs the Lithuanian Melody Time radio program, WBMD, AM-75, Baltimore, sent me a Lithuanian traveler's course with cassette. Carol and Al got me started.

How do you get started? First, it is always best to study under a gifted instructor. After many months, it has become my good fortune to have located a Lithuanian speaking woman who is an excellent teacher. I also have a correspondence with a Lithuanian linguist who holds a chair at a well respected American university. Should you have the same good fortune, it is next best to have someone to speak with, either another student or a native speaker, and do so frequently.

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These two suggestions presuppose that total language immersion is not possible. If it is, that is you are able to spend some period of time totally immersed in Lithuanian, no English whatsoever, DO IT! Let nature take its course and become surprised at how quickly you can learn when creature comforts depend on it. Think Lithuanian! If possible, listen to Lithuanian radio, watch Lithuanian television or video, and otherwise get one hundred percent involved in the language. Not possible in America, you say? Some Lithuanian groups sponsor language camps which are advertised in various ethnic newspapers. If you own a radio with a Short Wave Band, you can tune in Radio Vilnius, channel 41 (megacycles), during the late evening hours. One popular Lithuanian magazine published in the United States lists some 20 local radio stations that have Lithuanian radio programs.

If, like me, you are forced to begin your study of Lithuanian without an instructor, with no other interested students, and you are not convenient to a Lithuanian speaker, DO NOT DESPAIR! Texts and tapes are available. These are the ones I found:

Marlborough's Lithuanian Self-Taught, fifth edition, by M. Variakojyte-Inkeniene has been in print for five decades. Unfortunately, I do not know of any record or tape for this book. It has a topical index and an easy to use pronunciation guide. Keep in mind that it is a British publication so if you cannot locate words for family members, try relatives. The book covers a multitude of topics and is a must for the non-Lithuanian speaking traveler. It costs about \$5.00 and can be obtained from Draugas, 4545 West 63rd Street, Chicago, IL 60629. Buy it and find a Lithuanian language speaker to make a cassette tape using this book as a guide.

The Balzekas Museum of Lithuanian Culture in Chicago has taken the lead in publishing a single volume Lithuanian language cassette, An Evening with Birutė, with Lithuanian songs and dances. This is an excellent course if you wish only to hear the language spoken and learn a few words. I applaud this effort, but it is a very rudimentary language primer. Nonetheless, use the tape for diversion from other study, reinforce your pronunciation, and discover some Lithuanian culture. The museum promises a second volume which, if based on and improved upon the first, will be an outstanding contribution to persons wishing to learn Lithuanian. The existing volume costs about \$15.00 and can be obtained from the Balzekas Museum of Lithuanian Culture Gift Shop, 6500 South Pulaski Road, Chicago, IL 60629. Telephone

orders accepted, (312) 582-6500, with use of a major credit card.

Two older Lithuanian Language courses for travelers can probably still be found when shopping in an ethnic flea market or at the annual Lithuanian festivals held in many major cities. Both were originally published with 45 or 33 1/3 records. The first is a pamphlet of some 20 lessons, with about 20 expressions per lesson, done in 15 pages. It is published by the Conversaphone Institute, 225 West 34th Street, New York, NY 10001 and entitled Lithuanian Instruction Manual, copyrighted 1971. I was given a copy of this course with cassette so I do not know if the company still exists.

The other course was published as a two speed record course by Foreign Language Studies (FLS), Suite 1206, 280 Madison Avenue, New York 16, New York. It was copyrighted in 1959 with all rights reserved. My letter to the above address to replace my missing record was returned because of an "insufficient address". However, the course was translated into Lithuanian by Alfonsas Sešpiaukis, Lecturer in Lithuanian, Columbia University, New York. Columbia University may be a source for obtaining this course which appears to be absolutely excellent. Anyone knowing how to obtain records or tapes for this course should write to the author of this article.

The next two texts both have accompanying cassette tapes and, in my opinion, are the very best available. One is designed to teach young children but is also very appropriate for adult learning. The other could be used either for high school or college students. Ideally, begin your study with Lietuviais Norime Ir Būt and complete it with Introduction to Modern Lithuanian.

Lietuviais Norime Ir Būt by D. Tamulionytė begins with the very basics -- the Lithuanian alphabet. Lessons are divided into dialogues, followed by questions, and then the presentation of new material. The text contains English readings which describe the customs, history and culture of Lithuania. There is an accompanying workbook. I highly recommend this book as the Lithuanian language book for the student who has no prior experience in learning languages or the very young student. You should begin your study of Lithuanian (and Lithuania) with Lietuviais Norime Ir Būt. It can be purchased from Draugas, 4545 West 63rd Street, Chicago, IL 60629 for about \$20.00. The workbook costs about \$3.00 and two 90-minute cassette tapes, which record all the Lithuanian in the text, cost about \$15.00.

Introduction to Modern Lithuanian by A. Klimas, L. Dambrionas, and W. Schmalstieg is the choice of universities offering instruction in Lithuanian; Kent State, Columbia, and the University of Rochester to name three I know. The introduction for this text has a lengthy and sometimes complicated explanation of pronunciation, diphthongs, and vowels; however, this can be avoided or studied later when the student is ready. This work is an excellent follow on to Lietuviaiš Norime Ir Būt and it too comes with language tapes. Caution should be exercised when purchasing tapes. It seems that two sets of tapes have been produced for this work. Originally, a set of three 90-minute tapes were made using native speakers. These tapes have been copied many times over a 20 year period and have lost clarity and are uncomfortable to the ear learning Lithuanian for the first time. The other set is available from Darbininkas, The Franciscan Father's Press, 341 Highland Blvd, New York, NY 11207 for about \$25.00 plus \$1.00 postage. This is a four 90-minute cassette volume which includes all readings from the back of the book. Tapes are excellent and clear but the student is wise to listen to the four and ascertain their quality. Bad tapes have been found. Introduction to Modern Lithuanian by Klimas, Dambrionas, and Schmalstieg will nicely complete your Lithuanian language library.

Another outstanding children's book is Richard Scarry's Best Word Book Ever translated into Lithuanian as Mano Žodynas and published by the Lithuanian Educational Council of America, Chicago. Each page of this book is busy with numerous illustrations of cute little animals involved in everyday activities. The bear family, for example, is depicted preparing for a new day much the same as you or I would. Pictures and illustrations are labeled with Lithuanian words for every activity and thing represented. Each page demands careful scrutiny. You will find wonderful detail and another way to learn Lithuanian words. My sister, Karolina, an engineer, can amuse herself for hours with this book. It is available from Draugas for about \$10.00.

A Lithuanian coloring book for children, Kalbėkime Lietuviškai by Nijole Mackevičienė, is available and useful for adult learning. It can be purchased from Draugas for about 2.00. It offers diversion from study and reinforces vocabulary. It is a wonderful way to relieve stress and learn language basics. I bought a set of coloring pencils and colored "obuolys" red and blended "lapai" in fall colors. I colored the number "aštuoni" with the tricolors, "geltona, žalia, ir raudona".

Now that you know where to begin, the question may be how to begin. Assuming that a qualified instructor is not available, the student would be wise to choose a travelers course such as that offered by Conversaphone or FLS. Marlborough would be the best choice if you can find a Lithuanian language speaker to read phrases and vocabulary onto a cassette. Your learning technique now becomes one of constant repetition just as you learned your native language from infancy onward.

When starting out alone, do not complicate your learning by translating phrases word for word -- in many cases this is impossible anyway. If, for example, you were to learn the sentence, "Mary had a little lamb.", you only need to understand that Mary possessed a small lamb and not the parts of speech. You will learn particulars as you progress with your study. Strict memorization is the best way to begin and do this by using the multisensual approach -- see the word, hear the word, speak the word, think the word, and feel it if you can. Say aloud what [Ayou hear while listening to a record or tape as you read is the best way to use this method.

One college instructor taught me the value of dialogue memory; each dialogue of every chapter was memorized and spoken in class until the student could do so without fault. Fifteen years have passed and I can still repeat conversations between Doña Mercedes and her son Julio. The hard work paid off when I began to converse with Spanish natives who spoke no English. Imagine my delight when a hostess at a Spanish art exhibit, upon learning that I am an American, apologized in my behalf because "Americans don't bother to learn a second language". She was chagrined when I ignored her remark and began speaking to the Spaniards in their own language.

Avoid boredom! Skip around in your text. Learn to count to ten, then go back to dialogue. Next learn the days of the week, the months, etc. Make up index cards and tape them to the objects they name. In short, devise ways to live your new language. One student taped verb conjugations on his bathroom wall! Don't worry about what tense you are speaking or the spelling of the word. Learn the sounds and what they mean. More formal courses will instruct in the particulars. Your theme in language study should be, "if it helps you learn, use it"!

Learn useful phrases like, "I don't understand", "Please excuse me", and "I don't speak Lithuanian fluently but...". Know how to say, "Please speak slowly" and "May I use the toilet". Be able to introduce yourself and tell time. A few phrases like these will net all the help you might want from those who speak

the language.

Figure out those events in your life which offer plenty of repetition or things you can do to concentrate in Lithuanian. Draw an apple or color an apple in a Lithuanian coloring book. As you do so, let your mind understand "obuolys" and realize that "raudona" is the color you should be using. Obtain a Lithuanian calendar, or make one, and learn the days, dates, and months. Concentrating on one day at a time, you should learn the days of the week, how to count to 30, and the names of two or more months of the year in only 30 days, and without any real effort.

Retain a tutor or instructor if you can. If you do, insist on some regimen and make demands on yourself. Use your cassettes to learn proper pronunciation. Actively attempt to think in Lithuanian and check yourself. Think how you might use a phrase, say a sentence, or ask a question and then learn how to do it. Soon, you will be amazed at what you know and the day may soon come when you dream and think in Lithuanian. Check your dreams and grade your thinking by making sure you are grammatically correct.

Learning a new language by yourself or with an instructor is not easy. It can be boring, especially with constant repetition, and it can be complicated. But it is also fun and exciting and useful. If it seems like it takes a long time to learn, remember the slower you learn a language the better you will retain it. Convince yourself of the usefulness of learning a second or third language. Several mice know the value of a second language.

A cat chased a mother mouse into a hole in the wall. The mother mouse and children mice were hungry and needed food. Remembering that the cat was afraid of dogs, the mother mouse barked like a dog. This caused the cat to run away. The mother mouse said to her young, "See how useful it is to know another language!" (Story from The Mouse That Knew a Foreign Language, Lietuviai's Norime Ir Būt, Lithuanian Educational Council of the U.S.A., Inc., Chicago, 1982, p. 25).

My goal will be to visit Lithuania as an American who can speak the language of his forefathers, if only a few phrases. This will be my testimony to democracy. It demonstrates freedom to pursue heritage, its customs and culture. It is a subtle strike against the Sovietization of Lithuania. Knowledge cannot be taken away from you. The knowledge that we can choose to learn the language of our choice, the language of our common

forebearers, speaks for itself, excuse the pun. And you can do it by yourself... Let's learn Lithuanian.

Iki pasimatymo. Sudiev. Jonas.

Jonas Keidošius is Lieutenant Commander John Keydash of the United States Navy. Now stationed in Washington, DC, he actively pursues learning about his Lithuanian heritage and the Lithuanian language. He recently jogged the Annapolis 10-mile run in honor of his grandfather, Kazimieras, wearing the Lithuanian tricolors. You can write to Commander Keydash at Post Office Box 1311, Suitland, Maryland 20746.

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Jonas